

**Remarks by Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.
Anti-Trafficking In Persons Reception
Residence of the Ambassador
August 19, 2010**

Senator Villar, Undersecretaries Baraan, Salazar, Conejos, and Transmonte, Congresswoman Climaco-Salazar, fellow Ambassadors, other representatives of Philippine government agencies and the NGO community, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to my home.

As U.S. Ambassador to the Philippines, I host a number of receptions, but I can't think of one I've been more excited about than this gathering of people who share my passionate desire to end human trafficking.

People often ask me why I care so much about trafficking, and I'll tell you: I'm a father. I have nieces, nephews, godchildren. I know that trafficking rings prey upon children, who may be subjected to forms of torture, or who may lose their childhood to forced labor. The traffickers also target people who are simply doing what we all do: looking for ways to improve their own lives, or to provide for a younger generation. But these traffickers deceive desperate people and turn their lives into a living hell. It is, quite simply, despicable, and I can think of no better legacy for my time here than having worked effectively with all of you to make progress against this evil practice.

I am, therefore, deeply grateful for your shared commitment to this cause. Your work to prosecute traffickers, protect victims, and prevent trafficking keeps the lives of countless men, women, and children from becoming permanently, indelibly marked by abuse and exploitation. The work you do makes a difference in people's lives.

As many of you know, addressing trafficking in persons, a modern-day form of

slavery that crosses cultures and continents, is not just a priority of mine here in the Philippines; it is an issue the U.S. Government works to combat worldwide. In that regard, earlier today Secretary de Lima and I signed a letter of agreement on a project designed to improve the prosecution rate for trafficking crimes.

To support this effort, the United States has sent two federal prosecutors to the Philippines to work with the government to improve prosecutions – Sheila and Nancy, raise your hands so folks can see who you are.

Also with us today from Washington is Ms. Christine Chan-Downer from the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. She traveled here to witness personally the tremendous commitment the Aquino administration and Philippine lawmakers are making to combat human trafficking. We also have representatives from U.S.-supported NGOs, including the International Justice Mission, Visayan Forum, and Verite. The U.S. Government does more than just write reports about trafficking – we stand by our partners in the government and NGO community in this fight.

The commitment to protecting and promoting respect for human rights is a shared legacy of our two great nations, and I want to take this opportunity to personally thank each of you for your efforts to combat the gross injustice that is human trafficking. Mother Theresa once said that, "To keep a lamp burning, we have to keep putting oil in it." Together, as we keep adding oil, we will take the "War on Trafficking" to the next level. *Tama na! Labanan nating lahat ang trafficking.*